

Sunday Star 12 July 1970
Using the Evidence

By CARROLL QUIGLEY

CLIMATE, MAN, AND HISTORY. By Robert Claiborne. W. W. Norton. 444 pages. \$8.95.

THE FIRST CIVILIZATIONS: The Archaeology of Their Origins. By Glyn Daniel. 95 figures and illustrations. Apollo Paperback. Thomas Y. Crowell. 208 pages. \$4.95.

Robert Claiborne is a freelance journalist and senior editor of the magazine, *Hospital Practice*. Glyn Daniel is, with the possible exception of Stuart Piggott, Britain's top prehistorian. Yet, where these two volumes overlap, the amateur is far superior to the expert. The reason is simple: the amateur tries to explain the influence of climate on human history using all the evidence available from any discipline, but the expert seeks to explain the origins of the seven primary civilizations using only archaeological evidence. This difference in the use of evidence reflects two different minds: The Claiborne mind, lively, imaginative, skeptical, draws information from all directions like a vacuum cleaner; the Daniel mind is stodgy, descriptive, dogmatic, and prejudiced.

"Climate, Man, and History" covers what the title indicates. Part One explains how climate operates and tries to establish the sequence of climate patterns in the past. Part Two tries to fit our knowledge of human origins and early man into the sequence of past climates. Part Three uses climate as a framework for explaining the origins of the early civilizations, and Part Four deals with the climate factor in Western history since Greece and Rome.

On this vast stage, through all four acts, Claiborne performs like a virtuoso. He seems to have read everything up to the moment of publication, is familiar with most of the scholarly disputes, and has his own tentative judgments about these. His attitude is scientific, and his style is breezy and informal. He examines the evidence as it is now available and puts it together to provide the most likely version of this moment. But like all good scientists, he is fully aware that today's interpretation of the evidence may be modified or discarded tomorrow. Unlike Daniel, he is also fully aware of the distinctions between facts, theories, and words.

In Part One, Claiborne explains the methods available for establishing the chronology of the past, a matter in which climate is a major factor. He deals with geological stratigraphy, glacial deposits (varves), oceanic bottom cores, carbon-14 and potassium-argon dating, shifting terrestrial poles and magnetic reversals, and other methods for prehistoric dating. The framework established in Part One is used in the historical interpretation of the rest of the volume.

Claiborne's style of writing is close to slang. This leads, perhaps, to rapid reading, but there is, in Part One at least, too obvious an effort to be breezy and rapid. As one consequence, there are too many careless errors: he confuses the rotation of the earth with its revolution, and equally confuses varve-counting with stratigraphy, as well as the shifts of the earth's poles with reversals of its magnetic field; he tells us that the glacial period lasted two "billion" years, but six pages later has it at two million; he misplaces Professor Emiliani from the University of Miami to the University of Florida, then misplaces "Central Africa" from the source of the Zambezi to a source of the Nile.

In spite of such numerous and needless errors, this is an outstanding book, well worth reading for its succinct summaries of discoveries and disputes about climate and history.

The key to Daniel's book lies in its subtitle: he is not concerned with the origins of the seven early civilizations but with the light which archaeology throws on those origins. This is hardly worth doing, for efforts to reconstruct any past history must use all available evidence; it must also be based on some conception of the nature of human society and of the processes of social change. Here Daniel is woefully lacking. Instead, he has written a confused book which seems to be part of some private war of his own against historians and diffusionists.

Daniel begins with an attack on Arnold Toynbee for using historical (that is, written) evidence with insufficient attention to archaeological evidence. He assumes, quite incorrectly, that there are only these two kinds of evidence and thus ignores a third kind, based on what we know from recent studies of the world we live in. It is this last kind of knowledge, in fact, which allows us to give functions or historical significance to archaeological or written evidence. But Daniel ignores all this and, as a result, flounders about in such matters as the origins of agriculture, where essential evidence in plant genetics or in botanical and palaeobotanical studies is ignored. Instead, he tells us, "Prehistory is prehistoric archaeology" (his emphasis). Anyone who does not agree with this writes nonsense. He

says (page 161) that non-archaeological theories of American origins rely "on non-existent or misrepresented facts."

A large part of this volume consists of Daniel's own ignorant attacks on those who do not share his views. He rejects the well-established sequence of palaeolithic, mesolithic, neolithic, chalcolithic, bronze age, and iron age, on the grounds that these are not accurate enough. He would replace them with the sequence: savagery, barbarism, civilization. This trio must be less accurate since it divides the same duration into fewer periods.

Moreover, the terms are misleading. The early neolithic peoples, who were generally peaceful peasants, lacking both weapons and fortifications, hardly deserve to be called "Barbarians." In fact, Daniel himself misuses his terms, telling us that the people of the Caribbean, at Columbus' arrival, were "not civilized peoples, but savages," although their practice of agriculture would make them barbarians, in his terms.

Much of this book is taken up with quibbling over terms. He would reject Gordon Childe's "Urban Revolution" for the prehistoric beginnings of urban life, on the grounds that the expression makes people think of skyscrapers; it should be replaced by "synoecism"! Daniel also rejects the terms "primary" and "secondary" civilizations for a useful distinction between those derived from neolithic cultures and those derived from peoples of previous civilizations. This is done since "Secondary" seems to have a pejorative meaning. Instead, he would use "earliest" and "later." The chief trouble with this is that some of the "later" ones (such as Minoan or Syrian-Canaanite) are chronologically earlier than some of the "earliest" (such as China, Meso-American, or Andean).

Daniel's organization and writing are as confused as his thinking, as he mixes his discussion of the origins of the "earliest" civilizations with explanations of how their archaeological discoveries were made. By the end of the volume it is clear that the origins got lost in the mixture of excavation accounts, revisions of vocabulary, and attacks on non-archaeologists and diffusionists. At the end (page 191) he concludes, "Civilization and history began seven times.

Why? Because seven separate societies in a state of cultural development in which they were able to develop certain possibilities that, if used, could promote synoecism, accepted the challenge of those possibilities and became civilized." This will not satisfy most readers. Nor will they be persuaded by his belief that peoples who accept the challenge did so because of their "genius" (page 83), because they were "gifted people" (page 84), or because they had "judgment and high spirits" (page 143). This is a nineteenth century way of looking at these questions. The 20th century way, which Daniel ignores, is that civilizations began when an organizational structure, invariably based on a religious foundation, appeared among the people of an agricultural society in a fitting geographic context. This organization could be of any type which accumulated economic surplus and applied this to exploit new social patterns and activities.

Daniel ignores all questions of social organization, of economic accumulation, of social innovation, or even the role of "complex ceremonial centers" which he seems to feel are significant elements in early civilizations. It is probably too late to ask Daniel to stop criticizing Gordon Childe and other prehistorians long enough to notice what they say on these matters, but the ordinary reader will be well advised to read the breezy journalist, Claiborne, in preference to the dogmatic and crotchety Daniel, if he has any interest in how the primary civilizations rose and fell.